

Capitalizing on and Serving the Site and the Community

DLR Group — COLUMBIA GORGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Hood River-Indian Creek Campus

The new Hood River-Indian Creek Campus of Columbia Gorge Community College (CGCC) emphasizes educational accessibility and connectivity to its 10-acre site in the heart of Oregon's fruit country. This site is an environmentally-rich community landmark. Integration of the campus—accommodating site-specific programs with a focus on environmental science—into this context protects the landscape by creating learning opportunities for student and community use, while protecting sensitive landscape areas.

Planning for a New Facility

CGCC is a leader in sustainable technology education. Their wind energy program was the first of its kind west of the Mississippi. When CGCC came to Hood River to establish a satellite campus, they hoped to continue that tradition while exploring new opportunities for their educational programs.

The new campus project was planned and designed through a holistic approach that included college administration, academic scientists, architects, and the Hood River community. By looking beyond the syllabus, curriculum, and even beyond the building, the College identified previously unrecognized opportunities—specifically that their new site offered an array of natural resources that would support an innovative environmental science program that would attract students and prepare them for a leadership role in managing the region's natural resources.

Envisioning the Building Site as an Academic Resource & Community Sensitivity

The HR-ICC building sits on a highly visible but historically under-utilized site in the highlands of Hood River. The site is bisected by Indian Creek, which for years served as the main conveyance route of apples and pears from Hood River valley to shipping ports on the Columbia Gorge. With the apple chutes long abandoned, the creek had become a neglected landmark littered with debris.

The Director of Academics at CGCC, Dr. Susan Wolff, recognized the creek as a unique educational opportunity. Thus, planning for the new spaces began with imagining and developing an environmental science program that would make the most of the site's natural resources, making it an integral part of the learning environment.

This integrated academic planning and institutional visioning played a foundational role in the planning and design of the HR-ICC indoor/outdoor instructional complex.

CGCC's presence on this site created unprecedented public access to the creek. The subsequent rediscovery of this important natural feature led to a community-wide cleanup effort. This, in turn, has led to community-wide support of the Indian Creek watershed water quality monitoring program that is coordinated by CGCC students and faculty.



Environmental Responsibility

Careful site planning and a minimal footprint preserved the integrity of the site's wetlands and sensitive habitat areas. Sitting as they are on the far edge of site—the campus building and its parking lot—disturbance of neighboring residences and businesses was significantly mitigated during construction. Orientation along an east-west axis provides ample day-lighting inside while reducing solar exposure and HVAC load. Ongoing monitoring of the building's energy performance provides data for use as learning tools, while at the same time ensuring strict control of facility energy costs.

Financial Responsibility and Resource Efficiency

As a satellite campus, the CGCC HR-ICC building needed to be both efficient and cost-effective. Limited building space called for constructing a single science classroom/lab equipped to accommodate multiple disciplines, with a fully functional wet lab, fume hoods, chemical storage, casework, lighting, and HVAC. ▶

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However, the most unique feature that serves to enhance environmental learning is the simplest: a door to the wetland and creek outside. Locating environmental science programs on a site that features wetlands and riparian habitat represents the ultimate savings in fossil fuels: no travel is required for fieldwork.

The HR-ICC building, a one-room school house, models resource efficiency on a variety of levels. From an architectural standpoint, durable, local materials create a long-lived, regionally-appropriate structure. College staff appreciate flexible multi-use spaces such as the multidiscipline science classroom and the Student Resource Center. Student services, careers, and academic counseling are available on a limited basis, enabling current students to access such resources without expensive, full-scale duplication of main campus services.



Occupant Comfort and Well-being

The heart of the building is the Learning Resource Center offering informal learning spaces. Exterior decks provide opportunities to engage with the creek below, while extensive glazing provides expansive views to surrounding natural landmarks. Interior finishes reflect the region; a local basalt stone fireplace and soft seating create a relaxed environment for students and visitors.

Lessons Learned

Planning and design for the Hood River-Indian Creek campus building furnished a number of insights:

- ◆ Include academicians in the planning process. Establish understanding of their focus and goals. LISTEN to them, then act. The HR-ICC environmental sciences professor commented that the first time she entered the science lab she was blown-away by the space because it appeared to be custom-made for their ecology program.

- ◆ Don't underestimate the value of community input in planning and design (most applicable to community colleges, where programs tend to be more grassroots).
- ◆ Look for community passion that results in action (i.e., creek cleanup).
- ◆ Honor institutional and community sensibilities in the built solution.
- ◆ For small, highly efficient facilities, design for adaptability and multiple uses, as well as unique opportunities.
- ◆ Don't overlook simple or low-cost opportunities. Providing a door to the outside was the first step to creating an innovative environmental science program.

Using the building's direct access to Indian Creek, CGCC students have established baseline water quality data for the Indian Creek watershed and an upcoming class in energy efficiency will use the whole building as a learning laboratory. College staff now aspire to develop a certificate program in sustainable technology and environmental science.

Both the process of their planning and the outcome of their planning signal that critical goals for student learning and for sustainability can be met through a carefully and creative integrated planning process. ■

